

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11

OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-08 /077 W

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R 121711Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6552

INFO AMEMOASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1130

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, GY

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT PASSES BILL TO ALLOW EASIER AMENDING OF THE
CONSTITUTION

REF: GEORGETOWN 0996

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN A PARLIAMENTARY SESSION THAT WAS
TUMULTUOUS OUTSIDE AS WELL AS INSIDE THE CHAMBER, THE BILL
TO PAVE THE WAY FOR A NEW GUYANESE CONSTITUTION (REFTEL)
WAS PASSED BY THIRTY FOUR VOTES TO TWO AFTER THE PEOPLE'S
PROGRESSIVE PARTY (PPP) WALKED OUT. AT THE CONCLUSION OF
A SPEECH SHARPLY OPPOSING THE BILL, PPP LEADER CHEDDI JAGAN
VIOLENTLY OVERTURNED THE PPP FRONT BENCH, SPILLING PAPERS
AND MICROPHONES TO THE FLOOR, CALLED ON THE PEOPLE OF
GUYANA TO RESIST THE GOG'S POWER GRAB, AND LED HIS DEPUTIES
FROM THE CHAMBER. AFTER THE P WALLKOUT, ATTORNEY GENERAL
AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE MOHAMED SHAHABUDEEN HINTED THAT THE
NEW CONSTITUTION WOULD ALTER OR ABOLISH THE OLD CONSTITU-
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TION'S SAFEGUARDS ON THE RIGHT OF PROPERTY.
PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM, WHO PUT IN A RARE ALL-DAY
ATTENDANCE AT PARLIAMENT, ALSO CALLED THE GUARANTEE OF
PRIVATE PROPERTY INTO QUESTION. THROUGHOUT THE EIGHT
HOURS OF NOISY DEBATE, LARGE CROWDS OF DEMONSTRATORS, BOTH
PRO AND ANTI-GOG, MILLED ABOUT IN FRONT OF PARLIAMENT.
THE OPPOSING PICKETERS WERE BASICALLY NONVIOLENT, ALTHOUGH

E FEW SCUFFLES REPORTEDLY BROKE OUT AND A GREAT DEAL OF HECKLING OCCURRED. THE PARLIAMENTARY VOTE ENABLES BURNHAM TO DEPART ON HIS LONG TRIP TO MOSCOW, PYONGYANG, BERLIN AND LONDON SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE MACHINERY HAS BEEN SET IN MOTION TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS AND INSURE THE CONTINUANCE OF HIS PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS *PNC) IN POWER. END SUMMARY.

1. SHORTLY BEFORE 10 O'CLOCK PM ON APRIL 10 THE GUYANESE PARLIAMENT PASSED THE BILL TO AMEND ARTICLE 73 OF THE CONSTITUTION BY A VOTE OF THIRTY-FOUR TO TWO, THE DISSENTING VOTES BEING REGISTERED BY THE SMALL CONSERVATIVE, UNITED FORCE. BEFORE THE VOTING COMMENCED, THE TWELVE PPP MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WHO WERE PRESENT WALKED OUT AFTER AN EMOTIONAL SPEECH BY PHP LEADER CHEDDI JAGAN. JAGAN CAPPED THE SPEECH BY NOISILY OVERTURNING THE TABLE IN FRONT OF THE OPPOSITION BENCH. A REFERENDUM WILL NOW BE HELD ON THE AMENDMENT AND IF PASSED BY A MAJORITY OF VOTERS, IT WILL GIVE THE PARLIAMENT CARTE BLANCHE TO CHANGE THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION BY A SIMPLE TWO-THIRDS VOTE OF ALL ELECTED MEMBERS. (BURNHAM'S PEOPLE'S NATIONAL CONGRESS NOW HAS A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT.)

2. IN THE DEBATE PRIME MINISTER FORBES BURNHAM NOTED THAT PREVIOUS AMENDMENTS HAD MADE THE PRESENT CONSTITUTION A PATCHWORK. FURTHERMORE, IT WAS A COMPROMISE WORKED

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OUT BETWEEN THE PNC, THE UNITED FORCE (UF), AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AT THE 1965 INDEPENDENCE CONFERENCE. HOWEVER, IN THE YEARS SINCE, THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC HAS EVOLVED AWAY FROM THE OLD "COLONIAL" BASIS ON WHICH THE CONSTITUTION WAS PREDICATED. ONE COLONIAL "PRINCIPLE" THAT BURNHAM CITED WAS THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY. HE PROMISED, HOWEVER, THAT MANY ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT CONSTITUTION WOULD BE RETAINED DESPITE THE INTRODUCTION OF MANY NEW ONES. BURNHAM FELT THAT THE REMODELED CONSTITUTION OUGHT TO ENUMERATE CERTAIN DUTIES THAT THE CITIZEN OWED TO THE STATE. THE FACT THAT THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES IN GUYANA ARE SOCIALIST SHOULD RESULT IN A WIDE AREA OF AGREEMENT, HE CONCLUDED, AND ALSO SOME AREAS OF HEALTHY DISAGREEMENT. GRANDIOSELY, HE ADMITTED THE POSSIBILITY THAT NON-SOCIALIST GROUPS SUCH AS THE UF WOULD BE ALLOWED TO SPEAK THEIR MINDS BUT WOULD HAVE TO AVOID BEING SUBVERSIVE.

3. PPP OPPOSITION SPEAKERS CHARGED THAT THE PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF THE BILL WAS TO PROVIDE THE GOVERNMENT WITH A WAY OF DELAYING, PERHAPS INDEFINITELY, THE ELECTIONS WHICH MUST BE HELD BEFORE OCTOBER 26 UNDER THE EXISTING

CONSTITUTION. FURTHERMORE, THE REFERENDUM PROVIDED FOR
IN THE BILL MEANT THAT THE GUYANESE WOULD BE ASKED TO BUY
AN ENTIRE CONSTITUTION SIGHT UNSEEN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1130

4. PPP HEAD, DR. CHEDDI JAGAN'S SPEECH WAS HIGHLY
EMOTIONAL. FREQUENTLY RESORTING TO MARXIST ALLUSIONS,
JAGAN ACCUSED THE PNC OF BEING A GROUP OF REACTIONARY
HYPOCRITES. THE PNC CLAIMED TO BE A PROGRESSIVE FORCE
BUT IN THE PAST THEY HAD ALLIED THEMSELVES WITH THE
CONSERVATIVE UNITED FORCE. IN RECENT YEARS THE PNC HAD
CALLED THE MILITARY IN AGAINST BAUXITE WORKERS IN LINDEN
AND DEPLOYED MILITARY PERSONNEL AS SCABS DURING THE
135 DAY SUGAR STRIKE. THE PNC HAD MANIPULATED UNION
ELECTIONS IN THE GUYANA MINE WORKERS UNION TO INSURE
THAT A PLIABLE LEADERSHIP WOULD SERVE THE INTERESTS OF
THE RULING PARTY RATHER THAN THE WORKERS, ACCORDING TO
JAGAN. JAGAN CONCLUDED HIS SPEECH BY ISSUING A CALL FOR
ALL GUYANESE TO RESIST THE PNC'S POWER GRAB AND DRAMATICALLY
OVERTURNING THE PPP'S HEAD TABLE, LED HIS PARTY
IN A WALKOUT.

5. THE ANTICLIMACTIC FINALE OF THE PROCEEDINGS WAS THE
CALM LEGALISTIC SUMMARY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION
BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE MOHAMED SHAHABUDEEN. HE POINTED
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OUT THAT THE PNC COULD HAVE TAKEN A DICTATORIAL TACH MUCH EARLIER ON HAD IT WANTED TO. THE GUYANESE CONSTITUTION, HE ARGUED, SHOULD STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN AN AMENDMENT PROCEDURE THAT WAS TOO SIMPLE, ALLOWING POORLY CONSIDERED IDEAS TO BE ENACTED, AND ONE THAT WAS TOO RIGID PREVENTING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM FROM RETAINING THE NEEDED FLEXIBILITY. FAR FROM BEING AFRAID OF THE ELECTORATE, SHAHABUDEEN CONTENTED SOMEWHAT INGENUOUSLY, THE PNC WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE PEOPLE WOULD TRUST IT TO DRAFT A NEW CONSTITUTION.

6. AFTER THE PPP WALKOUT, THE VOTING FOLLOWED STRICT PARTY LINES WITH ONLY THE 2-MAN UNITED FORCE DELEGATES LEFT TO SAY NAY TO THE PNC JUGGERNAUT. LEGALLY, THE REFERENDUM NEED NOT BE HELD FOR SIX MONTHS BUT THE "SMART MONEY" SAYS THAT IT WILL TAKE PLACE BY JULY.

7. COMMENT: BURNHAM NOW GOES OFF TO THE USSR, NORTH KOREA AND EAST GERMANY (APRIL 11), THE POLITICAL MASTER OF GUYANA. HE HAS STEAM-ROLLED MOSCOW'S FAITHFUL VASSAL, CHEDDI JAGAN, AND SET THE LEGALISTIC MACHINERY IN MOTION WHICH WILL PERMIT HIM TO FINESSE THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WHICH WERE DUE NO LATER THAN OCTOBER. HE ALSO TAKES WITH HIM, IF RECURRING RUMORS ARE TO BE BELIEVED, THE DRAFT OF A STRONGER, MORE AUTHORITARIAN CONSTITUTION TO SHOW THE SOVIETS, THE KOREANS, AND THE EAST GERMANS, WHICH HE PROBABLY HOPES WILL CONVINCE THEM THAT BURNHAM AND THE PNC ARE THE ONLY LOGICAL ONES TO DEAL WITH IN GUYANA AND NOT THE FADING JAGAN AND THE PPP.
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